

United States District Court
District of Wyoming

Our office has been receiving inquiries regarding the case of Castaneda v. United States, No. 96-CV-099.

This was a civil case arising out of an alleged entry into an apartment by law enforcement officials in June of 1993. The Plaintiffs, who were staying in the apartment, alleged that the officials violated their civil rights. They filed an action against the United States, unnamed INS agents, Big Horn County, the County Sheriff, and unnamed Sheriff's deputies.

The complaint was filed in the Federal District Court for the District of Wyoming in May, 1996. The federal defendants were primarily represented by attorneys with the Constitutional Torts Branch of the Civil Division of the Department of Justice. The County defendants were represented by non-federal attorneys. The case was settled following a settlement conference in 1997. The court did not rule on Plaintiffs' claims or any other legal issues in the case. After the settlement conference, Big Horn County Sheriff, David M. Mattis, issued a "Policy." In the "Policy," the Sheriff purports to impose conditions upon federal law enforcement operations in the County.

We have learned that it has been reported, erroneously, that the court made a legal ruling in the Castaneda case regarding the authority of federal law enforcement officials to conduct operations in the County. There was no such ruling or decision. Instead, the court simply granted a motion, submitted jointly by all the parties, to dismiss the case because the parties had settled.

This Court has never issued an order which would serve to limit the lawful activities and duties of federal law enforcement officers and other federal employees in the District of Wyoming.

Furthermore, this Court has never made the comments attributed to it which purports to advise state officers they can prohibit federal law enforcement officers or agents from entering a Wyoming County. Those alleged quotations are utterly false.

Any person who interferes with federal officers in performance of their duties subjects themselves to the risk of criminal prosecution.

William F. Downes
Chief Judge, District of Wyoming